DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 352 145 PS 020 921

TITLE	Family Support Programs and School-Linked Services: Overview of Family Support Programs.
INSTITUTION	Family Resource Coalition, Chicago, IL.
SPONS AGENCY	Administration for Children, Youth, and Families (DHHS), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	[91]
CONTRACT	90-CJ-0960
NOTE	5p.; For related documents, see PS 020 919-923.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Agency Cooperation; Child Welfare; Community Services; *Comprehensive Programs; Early Childhood Education; *Early Intervention; Elementary Secondary Education; *Family Programs; Models; *Parent Education; Preschool Children; Program Descriptions; *Social Services; *State Programs
IDENTIFIERS	*Family Support

ABSTRACT

Family support programs are proactive efforts based on the assumptions that families have primary responsibility for their children's development and well-being; healthy families are the foundation of a healthy society; families operate as part of a total system; and social service agencies should assist families' efforts to raise their children effectively. Typical program components include life skills training, parent education and support groups, parent-child groups and family activities, informal interaction, information and referral services, and crisis intervention. In recent years, school initiatives to support families have focused on work with preschool parents to ensure children's school readiness; the involvement of parents in school programs and administration; and the integration of community health and social services into the school. A number of states have taken ambitious steps toward directly addressing the social service and health needs of at-risk students and their families. Programs such as Texas's Communities in Schools Programs, New Jersey's School Based Youth Services Program, Connecticut's Family Resource Center Program, and Kentucky's Family Resource and Youth Service Centers Program represent efforts to locate a full spectrum of health and social services in close proximity to students and families. The challenge for these programs is to integrate local, state, and federal health and social services into public school systems that are funded largely through local taxation. Brief descriptions of these four programs and five resource organizations are provided. (AC)

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Family Support Programs and School-Linked Services

PS 020921

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Overview of Family Support Programs

Family support programs began to appear in the early 1970s and are now proliferating across the country. Initially established as small, grassroots, community-based programs, they are currently growing in number, size, and complexity. The National Resource Center for Family Support Programs has developed a series of Fact Sheets that provide introductions to seven different types of family support programs, addressing the issues of child abuse, family literacy, school readiness, school-linked services, alcohol and other drug abuse prevention, comprehensive collaborative services, and incarcerated parents.

PREMISES OF FAMILY SUPPORT

The influence of the family on a child cannot be overestimated. The family is a child's first source of information and the primary model for how a child experiences relationships. It helps a child begin to communicate and to learn personal and cultural values and beliefs. The family teaches a child ways to live in a complex world, and it provides a child with a sense of belonging and a foundation for self-esteem. Families, and specifically parents, who are confident and effective in these responsibilities are more likely to raise healthy and productive children.

Dramatic changes have occurred in the structure and patterns of family life in the U.S. over the past 20 years. The population has become increasingly mobile, and parents often function without help from extended family. Divorce rates have risen. Many children are born to unmarried mothers or raised in a single-parent household. Others are "latchkey" children whose parents work outside the home. Family support programs have emerged in response to these changes. The settings in which they operate vary widely, as do the types of services and resources they offer to families. But all programs are geared toward a common goal: increasing the ability of families to successfully nurture their children.

Family support programs emphasize a proactive approach toward the prevention of problems. To this end, they provide supports which can enhance effective functioning within the family, and they foster a sense of family self-sufficiency and empowerment. The structured incorporation of the family into all aspects of programs to enhance a child's development sets family support programs apart from other kinds of services for families.

All family support programs are based on the following assumptions:

- Families have primary responsibility for their children's development and well-being; they need resources and supports that will enable them to fulfill that responsibility effectively.
- Healthy families are the foundation of a healthy society. Families who are unable to promote their children's development ultimately place the entire society at risk.
- Families operate as part of a total system. Children cannot be viewed as separate from their families, nor can families be viewed separately from their communities, their cultural heritage or the society at large. Decisions made on behalf of children must consider the ways in which these various systems are interconnected.
- The systems and institutions upon which families rely for support must assist families' efforts to effectively raise their children. They must adjust and coordinate their services so as not to hinder families' abilities to maintain positive environments for their children.

TYPICAL PROGRAM COMPONENTS

Family support programs operate successfully in diverse communities and settings. Many are separate, free-standing, non-profit agencies; others are sponsored by churches, hospitals, schools, day care centers, or colleges and universities. Specific program content and structure are determined by the needs of the families being served, and are designed to complement already existing community services and resources. Most family support programs include the following:

- Life skills training. This may include family literacy, education, employment or vocational training, or enhancement of personal development skills such as a problem solving, stress reduction, and communication.
- Parent information classes and support groups. These provide instruction in child development and opportunities for parents to share their experiences and concerns with peers.

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- Parent-child groups and family activities, which provide occasions for parents to spend more time with their children.
- Drop-in time to provide parents with informal opportunities to spend time with staff members and other parents.
- Information and referral services.
- Crisis intervention/family counseling to respond to parents' special concerns about their children or specific family issues.
- Auxiliary support services such as clothing exchanges, emergency food, transportation.

Introduction to Family Support School Initiatives

In recent years, a consensus has emerged that America's traditional approach to educating its children will not adequately prepare them for the demands of a global economy. Rising dropout rates and adult illiteracy are indicators that schools are losing the battle to keep students committed to their own education. Today, more than 30 percent of adults have not completed high school. More than 20 percent of African American and Hispanic youth leave school before 12th grade. In some rural areas, the dropout rate is above 40 percent. Clearly, we cannot continue to rely solely on the efforts of primary and secondary teachers to educate children; we must take a broader, more holistic approach to education.

Proponents of this approach argue that since children spend 70 percent of their waking time outside of school, greater attention must be given to the growth and development that takes place in their homes and communities. Studies have estimated that primary grade students actually acquire most of their literacy skills and knowledge during activities in non-school settings. And it has been documented that students who perform best on current measures of school achievement regularly participate in an array of challenging and entertaining activities that require them to practice reading, writing, oral communication, computation, decision-making and problem-solving skills. Studies show that children who have the greatest access to opportunities for literacy stimulation outside of school are the best prepared to meet the demands of our global society. Most importantly, supporters argue that the most recent education research clearly demonstrates that primary and secondary schools are much more effective at educating *all* children if they have strong partnerships with families and the community in which they serve.

Encouraged by the results of innovative parent-school-community collaborative projects and current research, several states, municipalities, and local communities have initiated very ambitious educational partnerships. The National Resource Center for Family Support Programs sees these partnerships developing into three broad categories: those that work with pre-school parents to ensure a child's school readiness, those that integrate parental involvement into school programs and administration, and those that integrate community health and social services into the school.

- **School Readiness**
  These programs provide parents with the information and support they need to raise mentally and physically healthy children who arrive at school prepared to learn. Often they are designed to provide services on a one-to-one basis. Other programs emphasize center-based early childhood programming.
- **Parent Involvement**
  Parent involvement programs are aimed at empowering parents to take a proactive role in the education of their children. While parent involvement programs like the PTA have existed for years, the new wave of initiatives seeks to involve parents more actively in the classroom as teacher's aides and in school management as advisors for curriculum review and school policy decisions.
- **School-Linked Services**
  The goal of school-linked programs is to improve student's educational achievement by ensuring that the health and social needs of all students are met. In these programs, schools serve as the focal point for the delivery of community health and social services for families. Services provided to students and their families include primary and preventive health care, drug and alcohol abuse counseling, family crisis counseling, day care, teen parenting classes, employment counseling and training, and transportation. Services are provided at the school or at a site near the school.

Although each of these approaches is distinctly different, the common thread that runs through all three is their emphasis on respect for parents, sharing of power and territory, and the explicit goal of achieving school success for all children.

State School-Linked Initiatives

In the past four years, a number of states have taken very ambitious steps toward directly addressing the social-service and health needs of at-risk students and their families. These states believe that by providing services at or near schools, they improve the likelihood that at-risk students will use them. The program models described below represent significant efforts on the part of states to locate a full spectrum of health and social services in close proximity to students and families that need these kinds of support.

That these programs are sponsored or heavily supported by states is significant. This represents a major step toward changing the larger system of service delivery for families in this country. These innovative programs attempt to organize multilevel funding streams into coherent networks of support for families and to locate services in easily accessible places, in or adjacent to local public schools. The challenge for these programs is to integrate local, state, and federal health and social services into public school systems that are funded largely through local taxation. By bridging the gap between federal, state, and local programs, sponsors of these programs hope to improve educational outcomes for all students.

These programs marked an evolution of school-linked service programs, and can be seen as the legacy of the national Head Start Program. In 1965, Head Start was the first program of its kind to provide a comprehensive package of health, social, and education services to a half-million disadvantaged preschool children and their families. The creators of Head Start recognized that the number of children in the country who had serious and multiple needs was growing, and that reaching them at a very young age and encouraging their success in school, provided the best hope for "breaking the cycle of poverty." In the early 1980s, the federal government began withdrawing funding from social programs; at the same time, the general public recognized the scope and complexity of the problems facing America's "underclass"—which had also become known as the "at-risk population"—and the failure of contemporary social welfare programs to address these needs adequately.

During these years, state governments began shouldering responsibility for the at-risk population. Many states initiated efforts to link social services to schools. Texas, one of the first, was especially concerned about the alarming level of dysfunction experienced by at-risk

teenagers. Texas implemented a program called Communities in Schools, replicating statewide a model that had achieved success in Houston. This model emphasized integrating community resources into schools as a means of engaging at-risk teenagers in their own education. The program used existing social-services staff and resources, repositioning them to focus on this group.

A New Jersey program also targeted at-risk teenagers. New Jersey saw high school as a logical place to identify teenagers in distress. New Jersey funneled money to its school systems, and empowered them to purchase needed social services. Connecticut's Family Resource Center Program grew out of the lessons learned from working with at-risk teenagers.

As the nation began to re-examine the problems of its poor, many people realized that the problems of the at-risk teen were far more serious than expected. People came to understand that many of the problems of disadvantaged children were, with proper early interventions, preventable. Connecticut's Family Resource Center Program was designed to reach distressed families before their children reached school age. Kentucky's Family Resource and Youth Service Centers, which began in 1991, provides a continuum of services for young children, teenagers, and parents. Kentucky understood that providing a stable support system for low-income families and communities is an effective means of prevention. This program attempts to improve the availability of support services in distressed communities.

MODEL 1: STATE OF TEXAS COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS PROGRAM (1988)

The Communities in Schools (CIS) program is a comprehensive dropout-prevention program, modeled after the national Cities in Schools program. CIS is designed to provide a holistic approach to addressing the multiple needs of at-risk students. CIS brings public and private agencies together to work with elementary, middle, and high school students who are at risk of dropping out of school. An interagency, multi-disciplinary staff works with students and their families to increase school attendance, improve academic achievement, increase graduation rates, decrease delinquency, promote personal and social development, and develop employment and vocational skills. In addition, the program staff makes every effort to increase parental involvement in school activities.

CIS began as a prototype in Houston in 1979. It quickly demonstrated encouraging results in helping students who are high dropout risks find new ways to cope with their difficulties and remain in school. Today, CIS is in 24 school districts across the state and serves over 16,000 students. Houston continues to lead the state in the number of students participating in the program.

While CIS programs vary from site to site, depending on the specific needs of the school-age population, most programs have six basic components: 1) individual and family counseling; 2) tutoring; 3) enrichment activities; 4) parental involvement; 5) referral to health services; and 6) job training and placement by local business communities. In order to provide this wide variety of services, CIS uses "repositioned staff" from several state and local agencies, as well as volunteers. Using repositioned staff is a cost-effective way to deliver social services closer to the students who need them.

MODEL 2: STATE OF NEW JERSEY SCHOOL BASED YOUTH SERVICES PROGRAM (1988)

New Jersey's School Based Youth Services Program (SBYSP), is the first statewide effort in the nation to provide a comprehensive package of services in or near high schools. The primary focus of SBYSP is to provide adolescents, especially those at high risk of school failure, with the support to complete their educations, to obtain skills that lead to employment, and to lead mentally and physically healthy and drug-free lives. Established in early 1988 by the Department of Human Resources, SBYSP attempts to eliminate artificial boundaries between the education and human services systems. SBYSP operates in 29 urban, rural, and suburban school districts, with at least one per 21 counties. These programs provide teenagers with a full spectrum of services on a "one-stop shopping" basis.

Each site provides the following core services:

- Health care;
- Employment counseling, training and placement;
- Summer and part-time job development;
- Drug and alcohol abuse counseling;
- Family crisis counseling;
- Primary and preventive healthcare;
- Academic counseling;
- Referrals to health and social providers.

Other optional services include:

- Day care;
- Programs for teen parents;
- Vocational education;
- Family planning;
- Transportation;
- Hotlines.

Since the beginning of the 1991-92 school year, four programs have serviced students in grades K-8. These sites offer similar services in elementary and middle schools that feed into the existing 29 SBYSPs established in secondary schools.

MODEL 3: CONNECTICUT FAMILY RESOURCE CENTER PROGRAM (1990)

Connecticut's Family Resource Center Program is designed to provide a comprehensive, integrated, community-based system of family support and child development services located in a school building. The Family Resource Center Program was established in the latter part of 1988, on a demonstration basis, by the Department of Human Resources. Originally, there were three program sites—one urban, one suburban, and one rural. Five additional sites have since been added. The centers are located in school buildings and benefit from their close association and alliance with a well-known, highly respected, and widely-used community institution, the school. Rather than being an additional burden on school staff and administration, the centers are operated by early-childhood specialists, who come to the school facilities to provide services. Beginning with new and expectant parents, centers provide a coordinated local service structure through which families access parenting education, family support, infant, toddler, preschool, and school-age childcare services, and family day-care homes.

Services include:

- Prenatal information and guidance;
- Child development education;
- Periodic hearing and vision screening;
- Home visits;
- Peer support groups;
- Adult education services including basic skills preparation, English as a Second Language (ESL), GED classes, and family management practices.

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- Information and referral services;
- Teen pregnancy prevention services;
- Childcare services;
- Support and training services for family day care providers.

MODEL 4: STATE OF KENTUCKY FAMILY RESOURCE AND YOUTH SERVICE CENTERS PROGRAM (1990)

Kentucky's Family Resource and Youth Service Centers Program represents one of the nation's most ambitious education initiatives. Kentucky's Education Reform Act (KERA) of 1990 authorized support for Family Resource and Youth Service Centers in all elementary and high schools in which 20 percent or more of the students are eligible for free or reduced price school lunches. The Family Resource and Youth Services Centers are designed to coordinate a community's social and health services for students and their families. Although the centers provide some services directly, the majority of their efforts are focused on accessing existing community services for families. In addition, centers work closely with state agencies to identify gaps in services and plan effective responses to these gaps.

Family Resource Centers provide:

- Full-time preschool childcare;
- After-school childcare;
- Parent and child education;
- Support and training for childcare providers;
- Parent-child activities.

Youth Service Centers provide:

- Health services;
- Employment service;
- Summer and part-time job development;
- Family crisis and mental health counseling;
- Drug and alcohol abuse counseling;
- Referrals to health and social services;
- Transportation;
- Family and community recreation activities.

At the beginning of the 1991-92 academic year, the first 133 centers were opened statewide. In the coming school year, an additional 120 to 130 centers will be in operation.

RESOURCE ORGANIZATIONS

The National Resource Center for Family Support Programs (NRC/FSP)
Family Resource Coalition
200 S. Michigan Avenue, Suite 1520
Chicago, IL 60604
312/341-0900 FAX 312/341-9361
The National Resource Center for Family Support Programs (NRC/FSP) was established to assure the availability of current knowledge in the field of family support on the design, development, and implementation of family support programs.

The NRC/FSP operates a computerized database to document and disseminate information on exemplary and innovative family support programs across the country.

The Center identifies and develops resource materials for policymakers and practitioners (such as program descriptions, bibliographies, program development manuals, training curricula and monographs), and provides technical assistance, training, and consulting in family support program design and operations.

National Committee for Citizens in Education
10840 Little Neighborhood Pkwy, Suite 301
Columbia, MD 21044
301/977-9300
A 19-year old nonprofit organization, NCCE is a national advocate for parent involvement and for promoting local action to improve the quality of public education. NCCE is involved in collaborative dropout prevention projects. Other services include a toll-free hotline (1-800-NETWORK) which offers advice to parents with school-related problems or questions; training in school improvement techniques for parents, teachers, and administrators; a computerized database providing information on issues such as parental and student rights, discipline policies, opportunities for special-needs children and adults; and the publication of books and a newspaper for parents, *Network*, focused on public involvement and school improvement.

National Association of Partners in Education
601 Wythe St., Suite 200
Alexandria, VA 22314
703/836-4880
The National Association of Partners in Education, Inc. (NAPE) is an organization devoted solely to providing leadership in the formation and growth of effective partnerships that ensure success for all students. Through its member programs—including corporate, education, government and civic leaders—NAPE represents the more than 2.6 million volunteers involved in the nation's 200,000 partnership initiatives in local school districts. Services offered through NAPE include networking; a computerized database; state, regional, and national conferences; specialized training for program development; national awards programs; a monthly newsletter; government relations; public awareness campaigns; leading texts in the field of partnerships; and national survey and research projects.

Institute for Responsive Education
605 Commonwealth Ave.
Boston, MA 02215
617/353-3309
IRE is a nonprofit public interest research and advocacy organization created in 1973 to study, promote, and assist citizen participation in educational decision making and school improvement. Their work is in the areas of policy development, technical assistance, research, and advocacy projects, and they have published case studies, research summaries, and resource and how-to guides about educational issues and school policymaking. Among their publications is *Equity and Choice*, a magazine published three times a year for administrators, teachers, parents, and policymakers, which describes innovative and model programs. Publications brochure available.

National Community Education Association
119 N. Payne Street
Alexandria, VA 22314
703/683-NCEA
NCEA began in 1966 to advance and support community involvement in K-12 education, community self-help, and opportunities for lifelong learning. The organization provides its members with national leadership and advocacy, publications, conferences, workshops, and information and referral services. Community advisory councils and partnerships of individual citizens, educators, and public and private organizations are used to address community problems and concerns. NCEA mail-orders its own and other focused publications including their quarterly *Community Education Journal* and *Community Education Today*, a newspaper printed ten times each year.

This publication was developed by the National Resource Center for Family Support Programs, funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau—cooperative agreement no. 90-CJ-0960 under contract with the Family Resource Coalition.

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